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S E C R E T DAMASCUS 000678

FOR DS, M, D, P, NEA, DS/IP/NEA, DS/TIA/ITA, NEA/ELA,  
NEA/EX, CA/OCS/ACS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/27/2028

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [CASC](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: EAC DAMASCUS - SEPTEMBER 27 EXPLOSION

REF: RSO MAP IMAGE E-MAILED TO DS/CC AND DS/IP/NEA

Classified By: RSO Daniel L. Chase for reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S/NF) The Damascus Emergency Action Committee (EAC) met September 27 to review Post's security posture following an apparent car bomb attack in Damascus earlier that morning. Charge chaired the meeting; A/DCM, RSO, MGT, POL/ECON, PAO, MSGDETCMDR, DAO, IMO, CONS, and GRPO attended.

¶2. (SBU) RSO briefed EAC on information available as of 1100 hours (all times local):

--At approximately 0745, an explosion was heard near the Jermana / Saida Zeinab neighborhoods to the southeast of downtown Damascus. According to local press reports (including the SARG-controlled local press), the explosion was caused by a 200kg VBIED and resulted in 17 fatalities and approximately 40 injuries (Post cannot confirm either the explosive load or the casualty count);

--The explosion, which appeared to involve at least one vehicle, took place near the interchange of the southern bypass road and the airport highway, approximately three miles from the Embassy (ref map);

--ARSO and FSNI visually confirmed that the explosion had taken place in close proximity to the headquarters of Syrian Military Intelligence (SMI) Branch 235, aka "Palestine Branch." The smaller SMI Transport/Patrols Branch is located adjacent to the blast site. ARSO reported that a 25-30 foot section of the compound's perimeter wall appeared to have been destroyed or removed, and that windows were damaged or missing on civilian buildings on the south side of the highway. ARSO observed that SARG cleanup operations were already underway and that no apparent efforts were underway to preserve a crime scene for forensic analysis. No/No crater was observable through the cordon of official vehicles set up between the street and blast site.

--All American Mission personnel and family members are accounted for; efforts are underway to account of LES employees. As of 1400 local, 15 of 16 U.S. Fulbright participants have been accounted for.

¶3. (S/NF) Comment: Branch 235 has wide-ranging responsibilities beyond Palestinian affairs, including counterintelligence, counterterrorism, and internal security enforcement. GRPO related that the Branch has played a key role in SARG operations against Sunni extremists in recent months. SMI is also responsible for providing the lion's share of security resources to protect USG facilities in Damascus; the SARG's apparent inability to detect and prevent today's attack in close proximity to an SMI facility reflects

a significant gap in host country protective security capabilities.

¶4. (SBU) EAC members did not have any further information indicating a specific threat against U.S. personnel, facilities or interests in Syria, but concurred that this morning's blast represents a significant concern that requires a review and adjustment of Post's security posture. In light of today's events, EAC recommended the following measures be undertaken from today through the upcoming Eid al-Fitr holiday (September 30 or October 1 through the weekend ending October 4):

--The Consular Section will temporarily close to the public (except for Amcit emergencies);

--The Damascus Community School (DCS) will close September 28-30 (DCS was already scheduled to close from October 1 onwards for the Eid);

--RSO will request SARG security liaison officers expand the Mission's perimeter by closing the side streets to the north and southeast of the Chancery Compound; instituting random vehicle stop-and-searches at the Malki and Rawda traffic circles approximately 100 meters north and 20 meters south of the Embassy; and temporarily closing the "visa broker" shops near the Consular entrance, which generate high-volume foot traffic.

--The American Language Center (ALC), a USG grantee program located next to the Chancery Compound, will close to student traffic through the end of the Eid.

--CLO will cancel a scheduled event for diplomatic spouses at the CMR;

--EAC discussed the No Double Standard policy; CONS will issue a warden message to publicize these measures coordination with CA/OCS/ACS; PAO is drafting parallel press guidance.

CONNELLY